



MILWAUKEE COUNTY
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Natural Areas 2015 Annual Report



Oak Creek Parkway –Forked Aster Hiking Trail

Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture

John Dargle, Director

Natural Areas Program Major Accomplishments 2015

1. Presentations by staff and partners at community events, workshops, schools, and conferences reached **1,805 citizens this past year**.
2. Through staff efforts and the substantial efforts of our partner organizations, we engaged **1,420 volunteers** who donated **40,456 hours** to improve the ecology of the Park System.
3. The financial impact of volunteers can never be overstated, because the value of their donated labor alone in 2015 amounted to a **\$899,741 community investment** within the Park System's natural areas.
4. The Natural Areas Internship Program (**3 Interns**) had another great year with our interns gaining important natural resource career skills while donating **708 hours** to the Natural Areas Program. Two of our interns this year were "Fin'terns" or fishery interns funded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.
5. Natural Areas staff made a concerted effort to conduct bird surveys (breeding, migratory, and wintering) throughout the Parks System's natural areas this year to provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of how birds are using available habitat. Staff conducted **1407 bird surveys at 123 natural areas and observed 101,663 birds consisting of 201 species**.
6. Partnerships are essential to our success, and in 2015 staff worked with **73 partner organizations** on a variety of important projects within the Park System's natural areas.
7. Continuation of the Natural Areas Program/Institute for Service Learning partnership with the **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** for a total of 4 classes and **26 students**.
8. Program recognition in 2015 came in the form of receiving the Lake Michigan Stakeholders "**Lake Michigan Champions of Conservation**" Award, the Bird City "**High Flyer**" Award, and the Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium's "**Sweat Equity**" Award.

Natural Areas Program Major Accomplishments 2015

9. Staff, volunteers, and partner organizations undertook restoration projects that enhanced and protected the ecology of **1,565 acres** of natural areas at **107 parks and parkways** in 2015. For a full list of sites and activities please see pages 4-7 in this report.
10. Maintenance and stabilization of **21.7 miles** of the Park Department's Forked Aster Hiking Trail System. Thanks to the efforts of the Student Conservation Association, AmeriCorps, and staff we opened another **3.0 miles** of trails.
11. Development and implementation of **Restoration & Management Plans** for natural areas within the Park System. These plans will guide our management efforts over the next 10 years. Plans were implemented this year at : **Bender, Cudahy Nature Preserve, Falk, Grant, Greenfield, Grobschmidt, Jackson, Jacobus, McGovern, Noyes, Warnimont, and a section of the Little Menomonee River Parkway.** A new plan was also created for **Dretzka Park.**
12. **Partnership Funding.** We received **\$919,339** in external resources from the Environmental Protection Agency and project partners (SCA, GLCCC, and the Alliance for the Great Lakes) through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the WI Department of Natural Resources, the United States Forest Service, Root-Pike WIN Initiative Network, Lake Park Friends, and the Southeast Wisconsin Chapter of Pheasants Forever.
13. Completion of the second year of **wildlife assessments** within the Milwaukee River Estuary Area of Concern (AOC), and completion of the Park System-wide **ephemeral pond** inventory.
14. **Citizen Science volunteers** logged an amazing **755 hours** conducting much needed wildlife research throughout the Park System.
15. Milwaukee County became a "**Bird City**" which is a community whose government educates its citizens about birds while implementing sound bird conservation practices. Milwaukee County's Bird City page can be found at: **<http://www.birdcitywisconsin.org/Applications/MilwaukeeCounty.pdf>**

2015 Natural Areas Management Locations

A.C. Hanson

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Anderson Lake

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

Back Bay

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Baran Park

- ◆ USGS Tree Swallow Study

Barloga Woods

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Bayview Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Bender Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Purple Loosestrife Beetle Release Site

Big Bay Park

- ◆ Friends of Big Bay Park– Weed-out

Brown Deer Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Eagle Scout-Wood Duck Houses & Benches
- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Cambridge Woods

- ◆ UWM Service Learning Park
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-AmeriCorps

Copernicus Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Native Plantings (Seed)

County Grounds Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Purple Loosestrife Beetle Release Site

Cudahy Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control –SCA

Cudahy Natural Preserve

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Ken Solis
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Dale Creek

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Dineen Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Doctors Park

- ◆ Friends of Doctor's Park– Weed-outs

Doyne Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

Dretzka Golf Course

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

East-side Bike Trail

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Estabrook Park

- ◆ Friends of Estabrook Park– Weed-outs, Native Plant Installations, and Hiking Trail Construction
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

2015 Natural Areas Management Locations

Falk Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Master Naturalist & CIT-SCI Events
- ◆ Wildlife Habitat Management
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance-Eagle Scouts

Franklin Oak Savanna

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Gordon Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Grant Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Friends of Grant Park-Weed-outs
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Youth Education Fieldtrips-Alliance for the Great Lakes
- ◆ Native Plantings (Transplants)

Greene Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Greenfield Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Native Plantings (Transplants)
- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Grobschmidt Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-GLCCC
- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction —SCA

Holler Park

- ◆ Weed-outs –David Ciepluch
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Honey Creek Parkway

- ◆ Weed-outs –Rich Stevens
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-GLCCC & Wauwatosa STEM
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Hoyt Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Humboldt Park

- ◆ Tree Education Day

Jackson Park

- ◆ Youth Education Fieldtrip-Alliance for the Great Lakes
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-SCA
- ◆ Native Plantings (Seed)

Jacobus Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Friends of Jacobus-Weed-outs
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Juneau Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Marquette Workday
- ◆ Friends of Juneau Park-Weed-outs

Kinnickinnic River Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-AmeriCorps
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance & Construction

2015 Natural Areas Management Locations

Kletzsch Park

- ◆ Friends of Kletzsch Park-Weed-outs
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Kohl Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Kosciusko Park

- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Lake Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ UWM Service Learning Park
- ◆ Native Plant Installation-Lake Park Friends
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Lake Park Friends Weed-outs

Lincoln Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Friends of Lincoln Park-Weed-outs

Little Menomonee River Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Grassland Restoration Project
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Eagle Scout-Wood Duck Houses

Lyons Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

McGovern Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

Menomonee River Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Community and REI Weed-outs

Milwaukee River Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Mitchell Park

- ◆ Eagle Scout Wood Duck Houses and Benches
- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Mitchell Blvd Park

- ◆ Story Hill Neighborhood Association Weed-outs
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Noyes Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ UWM Service Learning Park
- ◆ Eagle Scout-Benches
- ◆ Native Plantings (Seed)

Oak Creek Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Hiking Trail Re-route -SCA

Oakwood Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Pulaski Park -Cudahy

- ◆ Reforestation Project
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

2015 Natural Areas Management Locations

Rawson Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Real Academy/SCA
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Riverside Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys –UEC
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-UEC
- ◆ Native Plant Installation-UEC

Root River Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control—SCA & Ken Solis
- ◆ Reforestation Project
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Hunger Task Force Restoration Work

Scout Lake Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Uihlein Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Underwood Creek Parkway

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Native Plantings (Seed)
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

Veterans Park

- ◆ Fin'tern Event

Warnimont Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Stabilization & Maintenance-SCA
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Washington Park

- ◆ Native Plant Installation-UEC
- ◆ Invasive Species Control—UEC
- ◆ Fin'tern Event-UEC & Parks

Wilson Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Lowell Elementary School
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Zablocki Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Report Abbreviations:

GLCCC-Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps

SCA– Student Conservation Association

UEC– Urban Ecology Center

UWM– University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

USGS– U.S. Geological Survey

107 Park & Parkway Sites in 2015!

Natural Areas Wildlife Surveys

New Partnership with the WI DNR's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP)

The Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) was developed to assist landowners with identifying and achieving wildlife habitat and deer management goals for their property. Through this program the DNR assists landowners with developing a plan to implement forest regeneration practices that will emphasize the conservation goals of the property owner while considering the ecological impacts of white-tailed deer on the site's overall ecology. Natural Areas staff worked with the DNR's area Forester and area Wildlife Biologist to survey natural areas in Oak Creek and Franklin in 2015. Other natural areas in the north and central parts of the Milwaukee County Park System will be surveyed in 2016 & 2017. Milwaukee County is the first public property owner to participate in this program. It is important as land managers to have a full understanding of the negative impacts to other wildlife by allowing deer populations to remain significantly over carrying capacity. The DMAP program will help put the science behind current and future land management decisions.

What Type of Wildlife Surveys are Conducted?

Staff and volunteers conduct wildlife surveys for snakes, amphibians (frogs, toads, and salamanders), aquatic invertebrates (crayfish), turtles, and breeding, migratory, and wintering birds. We follow standardized scientific protocols when we collect data so it's comparable to other organizations collecting similar data within SE Wisconsin, because wildlife movement is based on habitat and not municipal boundaries. Monitoring wildlife populations is one of the best measures of ecological health and restoration project success. With that in mind, staff and volunteers conducted snake monitoring surveys at **3 sites**, crayfish and amphibian surveys at **14 sites**, and bird surveys at **123 sites**.

Are Urban Natural Areas Refuges for Rare Species of Wildlife?

Let's take a look. The Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative's All Bird Plan lists 118 species as birds of conservation priority in Wisconsin. Out of those **118 bird species, 102 (86%)** have been reported as being seen either during migration or during the breeding season within the Park System or in the near shore waters of Lake Michigan adjacent to the Park System's 14 lake side parks. In addition, looking at all of the wildlife populations that have been observed to date (birds, herptiles, invertebrates, mammals) within the Park System's natural areas, **73 species** are listed in the Wisconsin DNR's state-wide Wildlife Action Plan as "**species of greatest conservation need.**"

The Natural Areas Program made a special effort in 2015 to get a better understanding of bird populations (breeding, migratory, wintering) utilizing the Park System. Staff conducted **1407 bird surveys** that led to **101,663 bird observations** consisting of **201 species**. This will likely be a five year project with the minimum goal of at least one bird survey each week of the year at **154 natural areas** within the Park System.

This impressive ecological diversity is a testament to the enduring value of the Park System's natural areas and the unwavering management needed to preserve its integrity well into the future.

Natural Areas Education & Outreach Efforts

Higher Education

University Service Learning projects require students to undertake a variety of community service activities. Natural areas projects revolve around ecological restoration and hiking trail installation. Natural Areas staff worked with **26 students** this year at **12 parks**. Students participated through the **UW-Milwaukee's Institute for Service Learning**.

Community Education & Outreach

Urban natural resource management requires an engaged and educated community. It is always a priority for us to take the Natural Areas Program to the people. This past year staff gave **23 presentations** to **1805 citizens**. In addition, the Natural Areas Program continued to expand its hands-on learning opportunities for area schools (REAL Academy, Franklin HS Eco-Club, Greendale HS, Wauwatosa STEM, and South Milwaukee HS) in 2015. The Natural Areas Program regularly posted events and programs on its **Facebook page** which includes many pictures of this year's activities. So check it out to be kept up to date on what's happening with our natural areas and be sure to "like" us!

Citizen Science Program

In order to continue effectively managing the 10,000-acre Natural Areas Program, staff needs to engage all stakeholders in the stewardship process. The incorporation of citizen scientists into our natural resource inventories allows for the strengthening of an already well-built partnership between the Natural Areas Program and its volunteers, which will likely lead to many new partnerships. **Seventy three** Cit-Sci volunteers logged **755 hours** conducting science based surveys at **Bender Park**, sections of the **Root River Parkway, Greene Park, Greenfield Park, Grobschmidt Park, Franklin Savanna, Oakwood Park, Whitnall Park in 2015!**

iNaturalist

In 2015 staff established an online database for the public to submit wildlife observations on **www.iNaturalist.org**. Sign up for this easy-to-use reporting system and search for Milwaukee County on the "projects" tab!

Natural Areas Internship Program

Training the next generation of natural resource managers should be one of the most important components of any natural areas program. The Natural Areas Program extended its internship opportunity to **3 students** this past year.

Interns were provided training in natural areas management which included: equipment use, natural resource data collection, wildlife habitat projects (reforestation plantings), invasive species control, wildlife surveys, and plant/wildlife identification skill development. Two of our interns this year were **"Fin'terns"** or fishery interns funded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

In return for this learning experience, our interns donated **708 hours** towards helping us achieve our natural areas goals. Their efforts and personal sacrifices to further their careers and give back to the Milwaukee County community have been a daily inspiration for the rest of the staff and myself. It has been a privilege to work with each of our dedicated interns. Our interns this past year were: **Emily Ogas, Chloe Friday, Kendalyn Thoma**.

Natural Areas Hiking Trail System

While staff greatly encourages the interaction between citizens and our diverse natural areas, it is important that it is done in a sustainable manner. One of the ways the Parks Department and its partners provide this experience is through the **Forked Aster Hiking Trail System**.

Staff, working with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), AmeriCorps, Service Learners, and Eagle Scouts we were able to stabilize and enhance **21.7 miles** of existing hiking trails spread over **22 parks** in 2015. Building on the trail improvement success of the past few years, there are now more than **46 miles** of sustainable hiking trails within the Park System's natural areas for residents to enjoy.

Trail maintenance and restoration is an ongoing project and great strides were made this past year. Upon completion of our current enhancement of historic trails, the **Forked Aster Hiking Trail System** will eventually provide approximately **50 miles** of designated hiking trails within the Park System for park users to enjoy while protecting the natural resources that add to the quality of our citizens' lives.

To view and download pdf maps of Forked Aster Hiking Trail segments throughout the county visit the Park Department's webpage at <http://county.milwaukee.gov/ForkedAsterTrail>

Natural Areas Land Management & Resource Planning Activities

Thanks to our partners, volunteers, donors, and additional staff resources from the Parks Department, 2015 was another great year for restoration projects. Accomplishments included:

- ◆ Removal and control of **23** different invasive plant species at **40 parks and parkways**.
- ◆ Staff and volunteers completed the program's **ephemeral pond inventory project**. The six year study has documented **435 ephemeral pond** locations within the Park System. Ephemeral ponds are the main breeding and nursery areas for the majority of our native amphibian species, and important feeding areas for early season migratory birds. The next phase of the project has been inventorying amphibian and crayfish populations utilizing these ponds. Unique finds this year included the first **spotted salamander** recorded in Milwaukee County in **85 years**, a second population of **wood frogs**, and **5** populations of **diggers crayfish** which is Wisconsin's rarest crayfish.
- ◆ Staff and partner organizations trained **1,420 volunteers** that donated **40,456 hours** to improve the ecology of **1,565 acres** of Park System natural areas.
- ◆ Staff implemented Restoration & Management plans for **Bender, Cudahy Nature Preserve, Falk, Franklin Savanna, Grant, Greenfield, Grobschmidt, Jacobus, McGovern, Noyes, Warnimont, and a section of the Little Menomonee River Parkway**.
- ◆ Staff, with help from the **Franklin Eco-Club**, reforested an old **6.9 acre** agricultural field along the Root River with **676 native trees and shrubs**. Funding from this project was provided by the **Root-Pike WIN Network**.

The Financial Value of the Natural Areas Program

2015 Financial Investment in Natural Areas

Ecological restoration can require specialized equipment, herbicides, planting materials, educational resources, and trained staff, all of which can financially add up and prevent worthy projects from being undertaken. Fortunately, the Natural Areas Program has been able to leverage outside resources through grants and donations from partner organizations and volunteers. In 2015 the Natural Areas Program received:

- \$913,754** Grants or cooperative agreements (**WI DNR, EPA-GLRI, USFS, SCA, GLCCC, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Root-Pike WIN**)
- \$5,585** Donations of materials, equipment, or funding (**Lake Park Friends, SE WI PF**)
- \$899,741** Donated labor from volunteers (based on standardized rates published by the Independent Sector)
- \$74,093** Agricultural Lease Program and the CRP program that is managed by the Natural Areas Program
- \$44,400** Assisting with implementing the County's Land and Water Conservation Plan
- \$139,534** Funding from the Park Department's budget out of the County tax levy

A total value of \$2,077,107 towards ecological restoration and community outreach/education within the Park System's natural areas in 2015. That's a return on investment of \$13.88 for every dollar the Parks Department allocated towards the Natural Areas Program this year.

Special Projects for 2015

- ◆ The Natural Areas Program continued its long standing partnership with **AmeriCorps** by hosting one fall crew this past year. We were fortunate and excited to share the crew with the **River Revitalization Foundation (RRF)** to undertake invasive species removal and hiking trail construction projects along the **Milwaukee and KK Rivers**.
- ◆ Our partnership with the **Student Conservation Association** and **Johnson Controls** is a special project for our staff each and every year. The tireless efforts of these young men and women continues to make significant contributions to public accessibility within our natural areas (hiking trail construction) as well as improving the ecological health (invasive species removal). The opportunity to work directly with an organization so completely dedicated to the advancement and sustainability of urban youth is truly an inspiration for the Natural Areas staff. This year SCA worked at **Copernicus, Warnimont, Grobschmidt, Greenfield, and Noyes parks** as well as along the **Root River, Oak Creek, Underwood Creek Parkways**. A special thank-you to Program Manager, August Marie Ball, her crew leaders, assistant crew leaders, and crew members for their enthusiasm, dedication, and leadership.
- ◆ We can't say thank you enough to our grant funders and partners who provided the resources that allowed us to implement restoration projects and expand our natural resource surveys. The **WI DNR** provided funding for the expansion of a previous grassland restoration project along the **Little Menomonee River Parkway**, funding for the **Fishing in the Neighborhood Program "Fin'tern"** positions, and funding for seasonal staff and equipment to conduct wildlife assessments on parkland within the Milwaukee River Estuary **Area of Concern (AOC)**. The Natural Areas Program was also incredibly fortunate to receive a large **\$635,000 grant from the USEPA** to engage urban youth in the management of invasive species within the Parks System's natural areas. This is a three year grant that also funds project partners the **Alliance for the Great Lakes**, the **Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps**, and the **Student Conservation Association**.

Natural Areas Notable Partnerships for 2015

The Park People Weed-outs

Hands down, one of our most important and sustained partnerships. Weed-outs to remove invasive species were conducted in spring and/or in fall at **Big Bay, Doctors, Estabrook, Grant, Holler, Honey Creek Parkway, Hoyt, Jacobus, Juneau, Kletzsch, Lake, Lincoln, Menomonee River Parkway, Mitchell Blvd, Oak Creek Parkway (Mill Pond), and South Shore Parks**. These Weed-outs significantly improved the quality of our natural areas, and we are greatly appreciative of The Park People's consistent and tireless efforts to guide and nurture volunteers **(693 in 2015)** in a sense of community enrichment. Thank you **Jim Goulee** and **John Lunz** for your tireless leadership.

River Revitalization Foundation (RRF) Milwaukee River Greenway

RRF's dynamic land management staff led by Joanna Demas, made a real difference improving the ecology of Park System natural areas within the Milwaukee River Greenway this past year. **Five staff and 141 volunteers** contributed **767 hours** removing invasive species such as common buckthorn, Japanese knotweed, and garlic mustard!! As invasive are removed native are planted and this year RRF staff planted **400 native trees** and shrubs in historic invasive species removal areas!

Eagle Scouts Projects

Experiencing conservation at a young age often solidifies an individual's natural resource perspectives for life. This year scouts built Leopold benches and a large number of wood duck houses. Our sincerest thank you to the following young men and their families: **Brandon Haughey, Karl Arnold, Robert McCracken, Adam Dillard**.

Neighborhood Associations & Friends Groups

Too many outstanding partners to list in such a small space. Once again they donated their time, expertise, knowledge, and funding in order to enhance not just their local parks but also the larger Park System. At the end of the day, these parks belong to county residents, and they have shown an overwhelming desire to preserve the natural places that make our County unique.

The Urban Ecology Center (UEC) Riverside & Washington Parks

The UEC's tireless Land Stewardship staff, led by Kim Forbeck, had another great year at Riverside and Washington Parks. UEC **staff put in 7,364 hours** and their **volunteers donated** another **6,670 hours** toward restoration activities within Park System's natural areas! Accomplishments included smothering 5,000 square feet of invasive reed canary grass, planting 5000 native plant plugs and **150 trees**, additional invasive species removal on **32 acres** of parkland, inter-seeding prairie, and the creation of woodland planting beds!

Volunteers of Significance 2015

- ◆ **Franklin High School Eco-Club**– Franklin High School's Environmental Conservation and Outdoor Club has been a valued partner of the Natural Areas Program since 2013! Their volunteer efforts started with helping to collect native prairie seed at Grobschmidt Park, but have since expanded into assisting with ephemeral wetland monitoring at Rainbow Airport Prairie, Grobschmidt Park, and Franklin Oak Savanna, wildlife camera monitoring, snake surveys, and planting hundreds of trees for a reforestation project along the Root River Parkway. What a group of go getters! Thank you Franklin High School ECO-Club! We look forward to even more in 2016!
- ◆ **University of Milwaukee Conservation Club**–The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Conservation Club has gone above and beyond by not only providing outstanding educational opportunities for its members, but also by contributing countless hours towards bettering the Park System's Natural Areas! The UWM Conservation Club played a major role in the success of the Natural Areas Program's purple loosestrife bio control project by rearing thousands of gallarucella beetles! The Club also participated in the wetland monitoring program as well as assisted with several invasive species removal projects! Thank you Conservation Club!
- ◆ **REAL Academy**–South Milwaukee High School's REAL Academy has been an outstanding partner to the Natural Areas Program since 2013 when they helped to plant hundreds of native trees and shrubs as a migratory forest in Grant Park! Since then, the REAL Academy has tackled invasive species removal projects throughout South Milwaukee, including Grant Park, the Oak Creek Parkway, and Rawson Woods! This past fall, with help from the South Milwaukee School District, the REAL Academy was able to remove an entire fence line of buckthorn growing on the school grounds that was gradually invading the adjacent Rawson Woods! From us, and from Rawson Woods, a big thank you to the REAL Academy!

The Next Phase

This is an exciting time for the Natural Areas Program. New partnerships, programs, and funding opportunities seemed to materialize faster than staff could keep up in 2015. Thanks to major funding provided by the EPA, through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Parks was able to hire additional seasonal Field Technicians to button up a number of invasive species projects. This will allow us to finally start planting native plants back into some areas that have experienced multiple years of invasives control. This has always been one of our major goals, and work already began this year with the collection and planting of native woodland plant seed at a number of restoration sites. Other sites also began receiving their first major invasives removal activities and ongoing grant funding will allow us to get those sites to the next phase of restoration in a couple years.

The Natural Areas research arm continues to expand our knowledge base with year two of the EPA/DNR funding to collect wildlife occurrence data within the Milwaukee River Estuary Area of Concern, and some of our most urban natural areas within the northern half of the county continued to impress with a significant amount of wildlife diversity. Building on existing surveys, staff also made it a priority to get a better grasp of bird populations that are using the Parks System's natural areas throughout the year because birds are an excellent bellwether for measuring wildlife habitat quality. Staff was able to conduct at least one bird survey at 85% of the natural areas within the Park System this year. This led to 101,000 bird observations consisting of 201 species of migratory, breeding, and wintering birds. Our long-term program goal is to conduct one bird survey at all 154 natural area management sites at least once during every week of the year. That level of data will allow us fine tune the Department's bird conservation efforts across the Park System, and because many bird species are migratory, our conservation efforts can positively impact birds across two continents.

Our Citizen Science Program continued to grow exponentially this year thanks to the unwavering guidance of our Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator, and heavy emphasis was placed on monitoring the ephemeral wetlands in the Root River watershed. Thanks to the help of our volunteers and the efforts of our seasonal Wildlife Technicians we were able to finish the Natural Areas Program's system-wide ephemeral pond inventory that was started back in 2010. This project has led to exciting discoveries of 435 ephemeral wetlands harboring rare crayfish, fairy shrimp, salamanders, frogs, and American toads. In particular, this year's surveys doubled the known populations of wood frogs in Milwaukee County, and after 85 years of obscurity, a spotted salamander was found within one of the Park System's ephemeral ponds.

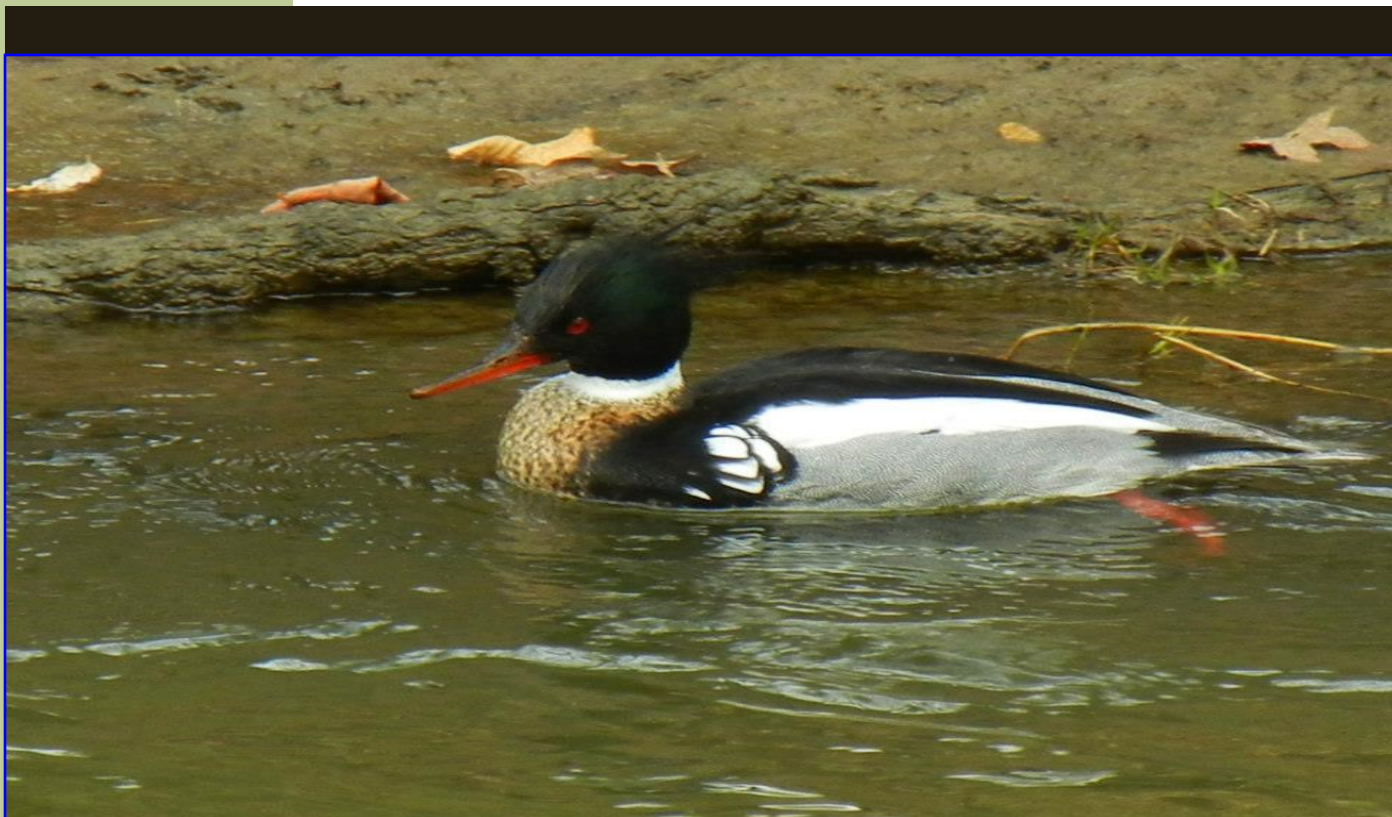
Finally, I would be amiss if I did not thank and acknowledge the continuing dedication of our partner organizations, that year in and year out advance our Program's mission. Unfortunately we only have the room in our reports to highlight a small subset of partners every year, but the rest of them know who they are, and they don't do their essential restoration work for the recognition. They do it because they believe in implementing conservation across a landscape that is bigger than anyone organization. The Natural Areas Program is truly fortunate to have you and your volunteers working side by side with us to preserve the enduring ecology of the Milwaukee County Park System!

Sincerely,

Brian Russart

Natural Areas Coordinator

Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture



Natural Areas Mission Statement

Blending Milwaukee County's Diverse and Unique Natural Areas With Its Culturally Rich Communities to Preserve and Nurture Its Natural Heritage for Current and Future Generations

Natural Areas Staff 2015

<i>Natural Areas Coordinator</i>	<i>Brian Russart</i>
<i>Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator</i>	<i>Julia Robson</i>
<i>Lead Field Technician</i>	<i>Samantha Geyer</i>
<i>Lead Wildlife Technician</i>	<i>Ryan Glasford,</i>
<i>Finterns</i>	<i>Chloe Friday, Kendalyn Thoma</i>
<i>Field Technicians</i>	<i>Konnie Her, Sierra Taliaferro, Amanda Gonzales, Tyler Mundt, Delainey Loedding, Alexis Bury</i>
<i>Wildlife Technicians</i>	<i>Michael Quinones, Samuel Fellows</i>
<i>Natural Areas Intern</i>	<i>Emily Ogas</i>